

Marketing Plan: COVID-19 Oral History Project

MMLIS GSBA 509 (Summer 2020)

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I. Mission & Objectives

The American Folklife Center (AFC) at the Library of Congress (LOC) was created in 1976 to "preserve and present American folklife" through research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibitions, publications, and training. Designated as the national center for folklife documentation and research, AFC seeks to collect, document, and preserve living traditional culture. AFC is one of the largest archives of ethnographic materials from the United States and around the world, encompassing millions of items of ethnographic and historical documentation recorded from the nineteenth century to present day. AFC's collections, which include extensive audiovisual documentation of cultural expressions and oral histories, offer researchers access to the stories and creative expressions of people from diverse communities.

On April 24, 2020, Representative Ami Bera (D-CA-7) introduced H.R.6615, the COVID-19 Oral History Project Act. The bill directs the Librarian of Congress to establish a program in AFC to "collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic" in the United States. This initiative comprises three main objectives:

1. To collect video and audio recordings of personal histories and testimonials of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as first responders, health care workers, survivors of the disease, family members of those who passed away from the disease, individuals with major life events affected by the outbreak, and any other individuals whose lives were altered.
2. To create and catalog a collection of the recordings, which would be available for public use through AFC's digital collections.
3. To solicit, collect, digitize, and catalog written materials (such as letters and diaries) relevant to the personal histories of health care workers and first responders who served during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H.R.6615 proposes the COVID-19 Oral History Project as a five-year project; it allocates the LOC with a budget of \$7,600,000 for FY 2020 and "such sums as may be necessary" for FY 2021 through FY 2024. The bill also entitles the LOC to partner and collaborate with other government entities and private organizations—including "existing archival and oral history programs throughout the United States" —in order to best facilitate the "soliciting, acquiring, and making available" of these testimonials.

(Sourced from [About AFC](#), [LOC Blog](#), [H.R.6615](#))

II. Description of the Initiative, Service or Other Offering You Are Marketing

In alignment with the three main objectives of the initiative, we envision a phased marketing approach that communicates the immediate and enduring value of the COVID-19 Oral History Project.

First, the LOC should market the COVID-19 Oral History Project to solicit and collect video and audio recordings. Since the LOC seeks to gather as many stories from the widest array of demographics as possible, the marketing campaign should be far-reaching, inclusive, and entice participation by highlighting the importance of individual voices—and why these contributions matter to the collective memory of this historic event. In this sense, it is critical to distinguish and market the LOC as a dynamic library in service to its national community rather than a government entity seeking to collect information from the public. We are marketing the LOC (and its AFC) as a vital and relevant cultural institution that seeks to amplify the voices of American individuals as a record of our collective culture.

Then, once the LOC has begun to solicit, collect, and catalog these video and audio recordings, the LOC should plan to market the COVID-19 Oral History Project as a publicly-accessible digital collection. Here, we get to the heart of our “Product”—the COVID-19 Oral History Collection. This collection will include videos, audio recordings, and digitized written materials that document personal histories and testimonies during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the age of social media, Americans are already accustomed to sharing their stories and documenting their personal experiences through varied digital and social media platforms. Although these experiences are largely ephemeral, the LOC can leverage this familiarity and comfort with digital storytelling. As a “Product,” the COVID-19 Oral History Collection is both a repository of digital storytelling and an educational tool for exploring ethnographic and historical documentation.

III. Target Market Analysis

In considering the 3 C’s of Marketing, our “Customer” comprises the entire United States! While we recognize that we cannot compile the testimonies of all 330 million Americans, we want to ensure that the COVID-19 Oral History Collection is as inclusive and comprehensive as possible and that it accurately reflects and represents both the diversity of the American public and the spectrum of personal experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Segmentation

Even though our “target market” is the American public, segmentation will be critical to the marketing of the COVID-19 Oral History Project in order to ensure that we are effectively adapting our messaging and value proposition to the vast array of segments that can be defined within the United States. First, we plan to utilize geodemographic segmentation. ESRI’s GIS mapping software will offer quantitative data to inform these geographic, demographic, and psychographic segmentation methods. Since COVID-19 has uniquely impacted communities based on geography, urban density, age, race, living arrangements, employment, and lifestyles, GIS and other “Big Data” sources will be critical to applying diverse geodemographic segmentation.

In addition, ethnographic marketing research could inform a strategy for behavioral segmentation. Behavioral insights are particularly important for the COVID-19 Oral History Project. To implement the broadest possible outreach, we will need to assess attitudes, knowledge, involvement, and trust for AFC and the LOC. This will also incorporate behavioral patterns with digital technologies. For example, which segments may prefer video- or audio-recording? Which devices might they use to record their stories? Who is more like to self-record or have others record them?

Targeting

In considering these major segmentation variables within a multi-year initiative, we recommend first focusing on a broad demographic segmentation by age. Using age grouping developed by the U.S. Census, we have chosen three age segments to form our target market:

Segment 1: Aged 18-34

Segment 2: Aged 35-54

Segment 3: Aged 55-75

These segments represent the majority of the U.S. population—according to SimplyAnalytics, approximately 23% are aged 18-34, 25% are 35-54, and 23% are 55-75 years old. Furthermore, it is important to note that within this target market, approximately 20% speak a language other than English—including 12% who speak Spanish. In communicating this inclusive initiative to our target market, it is crucial to be mindful of this and to both market and welcome testimonies in multiple languages.

In evaluating the attractiveness of these three generational segments, we hope to initiate our marketing approach by casting a wide and democratic net. Broadly speaking, Segment 1 has experienced the closing of colleges and universities, widespread job loss (particularly within service sectors), social isolation, and the need to care for older family members. Segment 2 has experienced a transition to remote work and homeschooling. Segment 3 comprises the demographic most susceptible to COVID-19, particularly those in retirement homes and senior care facilities.

Positioning

At its heart, the COVID-19 Oral History Project and Collection is about storytelling. In this spirit, digital marketing for the initiative is well positioned to leverage “consumers’ stories”—facilitating the creation of consumer-generated content serves as both our main marketing strategy and our end product. Likewise, our value proposition is the unique mission and singular importance of AFC as the nation’s center for presenting and preserving American folklife and living histories. The voice of each and every American matters, and these voices are vital to the collective memory of this historic pandemic. AFC and the LOC are welcoming every American individual to share their story for the national record. Furthermore, each experience is unique—a nurse in Manhattan, a UPS delivery worker in Louisiana, and a single parent in Washington each have a singular story to convey, and each is helping to preserve American living history.

In crafting our marketing message, it is critical to promote a message of inclusion and demonstrate that the LOC is an active listener. In an era of declining trust in public institutions and controversies around the federal government’s handling of the nation’s pandemic response, it is important to develop a positioning strategy that differentiates the LOC and AFC as an apolitical, transparent, and welcoming cultural institution that seeks person-to-person interconnection. The ease and efficiency of submitting recordings to AFC is also key to our positioning strategy. In developing a digital collection, contributors will be able to submit their recordings on a dedicated portal on AFC’s website, and this can be done while still adhering to stay-at-home orders for the immediate future. By communicating trust and value, the LOC can inspire and motivate individuals to participate and contribute to a record of public memory.

(Sourced from [SimplyAnalytics](#), Suni Gupta, Gosline et al.)

IV. Market Analysis

Market Trends

Since the COVID-19 Oral History Project is a national initiative, we recommend analyzing national marketing trends and effective strategies for marketing comprehensive digital initiatives.

This includes shoppable posts embedded in social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram that take the customer to the actual product when clicked on. A great way of using shoppable posts for the project would be to use our current Facebook ad platform to build ads that are engaging. Currently, the LOC has over 441,000 followers on Facebook and 76,000 followers on Instagram, and the ability to use shoppable posts could increase traction on the initiative.

In both soliciting content and providing content, content is central to our inbound marketing strategies. Interactive and high-quality content includes dynamic video and image content, useful blog content on the LOC's wide array of blogging platforms, and infographics and videos to demonstrate how to submit recordings. For inspiration, the LOC can look to the successful content marketing of StoryCorps, which is also archived within AFC.

To bolster inbound marketing, the LOC can experiment with trending social media optimizers. By using CoSchedule's free Social Media Message Optimizer, the LOC can tailor its messaging across Facebook and Instagram and utilize different strategies for characters, hashtags, and emojis. Likewise, the LOC can strategize and formulate branded hashtags through resources like All-Hashtag.

Regulatory Issues

First and foremost, Congress must pass the COVID-19 Oral History Project Act, and if passed, the LOC must adhere to the regulations outlined by Congress in the legislative directive. This includes adhering to the allocated budget of \$7,600,000 for the first fiscal year and adapting the project budget should funding change in the succeeding fiscal years. The project will also need to be completed within the five-year limit. Our collection initiative must also be mindful of any prohibitive privacy regulations. As part of the testimony submission process, we will need to obtain the consent of each contributor to archive and publicize the recordings in perpetuity.

SWOT Analysis for AFC and the LOC

Strengths: The LOC is a world-renowned institution with an established brand identity. From an internal perspective, the LOC has many established networks, connections, and partnerships that we can rely on to promote the COVID-19 Oral History Project, and we can use these resources as agents to further aid the initiative. By leveraging these existing partnerships—including university systems, corporate supporters, and nonprofit organizations such as AARP—we will have a broad and varied platform for public access and promotion.

Weaknesses: Internal weaknesses include Congressional oversight and buy-in, potential budget limitations, and the LOC's ability to actively promote the project to the American public. If Congress fails to pass H.R.6615, the initiative is cancelled. Congress may also approve the project with reduced funding, thereby hindering our ability to effectively develop and market the initiative. As a nationwide program, the COVID-19 Oral History Project requires many moving parts—a multitude of connections, relationships, and networks that need to be accessed to ensure clear and effective marketing.

Opportunities: As outlined in H.R.6615, the LOC has the opportunity to partner and collaborate with other entities and organizations. Since libraries and institutions across the nation are implementing their own COVID-19 documentation

projects, there may be opportunities to collaborate with other library and institutional networks to bolster AFC and the COVID-19 Oral History Project.

Threats: The biggest threat to the project is Congressional approval—the entire initiative rests on the decision of Congress. From a “Customers” and “Competitors” perspective, individuals may be more inclined to share testimonies with their local libraries and institutions, and they may feel their story has more relevance and value within their communities. Others may distrust the LOC as a government entity or be reluctant to share their personal and family stories with a public archive.

(Sourced from [HubSpot](#), [The Library Marketing Show](#), [Basics of Social Media Marketing for Libraries](#), [Top Marketing Trends for Libraries](#), [Forbes's Top Marketing Trends For 2020](#), [All-Hashtag](#), [LOC Cataloging in Publication Partnership Program](#), [LOC Partners](#))

V. The Competition

Cultural institutions and knowledge organizations across the United States (and around the world) are undertaking living history projects to document the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on both individuals and larger communities. In the broadest sense, AFC’s COVID-19 Oral History Project is competing with these other institutions for the collection of testimonies.

Comparing:	My Organization	Competitor 1	Competitor 2
General description of what the organization offers.	<p>The LOC is the largest library in the world, with millions of books, recordings, photographs, newspapers, maps and manuscripts in its collections.</p> <p>AFC preserves and presents American living culture through research, documentation, archival preservation, reference services, performances, exhibitions, publications, and training.</p> <p>The AFC Archive is of the largest archives of ethnographic materials in the world, and it seeks to make all of its audiovisual documentation available for public access and research.</p>	<p>Public library branches and systems:</p> <p>Public libraries are accessible to the general public and provide a variety of services tailored to their local communities. This includes information access, reference services, programming, public meeting spaces, and special collections.</p>	<p>Museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions:</p> <p>Museum and other institutions care for collections of artifacts and objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance. They may be public or private institutions, and their collections can be focused or broad.</p>

Summary of Promotional Tactics	Email newsletters and alerts, content marketing (including blogs and podcasts), social media marketing, press and media.	Content marketing, social media marketing, marketing automation, localized advertising, community partners.	Content marketing, social media marketing, marketing automation, advertising, community partners, press and media.
Additional Value (what does this competitor offer <u>above and beyond/in addition to</u> what I offer my patrons?)	N/A	<p>Localization. Public library systems are well known to their communities; they often serve as public meeting spaces and have integrated programming with local school systems and other public services.</p> <p>In collecting COVID-19 personal histories, public libraries systems may offer in-library opportunities and technologies to record testimonies. They may also collect physical materials. Individuals may choose to tell their stories to people they know, and they may feel their stories “matter” more within their own communities.</p>	<p>Specialization. Historical societies may focus on local, county, or state histories. Museums often have a defined area of collection focus and a dedicated membership base. These institutions generally display their collections through exhibitions.</p> <p>In collecting COVID-19 personal histories, museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions may collect a variety of digital and physical materials that will be curated into collections and exhibitions.</p>
What can my organization do to “defend” against the “additional value” areas listed in the row above?	N/A	<p>In defending against this, LOC and AFC should emphasize the ease of digitally submitting testimonies and the importance of individual stories as part of the nation’s cultural record. The collection and archive will be a vital educational tool for future users.</p>	<p>In defending against this, LOC and AFC should emphasize the democratic value of a digital collection. Rather than gathering materials that will be put on view in a specific institution, AFC is developing its collection entirely for public use, access, and research—a collection of American experiences.</p>

VI. Promotional Tactics

Tactic	Notes & Comments	Expected timing and completion	Estimated costs (per fiscal year)
Google Ads (Google Analytics)	This will resonate because it is aimed at all segments, because they are all on the Internet. The messaging will be tailored by using a combination of social media optimization and creative and elaborative ads that would be based off of the stories that have been collected, or it could be an original concept.	To implement immediately and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$672,000
Facebook and Instagram (Facebook Analytics)	This is aimed at all segments. This will resonate with the target market because all of these age groups are online and tend to cross pollinate on both platforms. The messaging will be tailored by use of the All-Hashtag generator, which will aid us in creating effective hashtags to get the most visibility. Furthermore, the messaging for Facebook and Instagram may take the form of various posts that can be video, audio, and posting links to other digital programming.	To implement immediately and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$936,000
Gmail (Google Analytics)	This will resonate with all segments that are Gmail users, because they are using the service actively and they will be engaging with ads from Gmail. Messaging will be tailored by creating targeted personalized ads for those Gmail users. This will be created by the collection of data from both ethnographic marketing research and ad tracking services.	To implement immediately and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$288,000
Branded Hashtag	Targeted to Segments 1 and 2. By creating a branded hashtag such as #TellYourCOVIDStory, we will to be able to create a strong and resonating message and enhance cross-platform visibility for the project.	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$4,000
LOC Website	This will resonate with all segments because all segments use the Internet. The messaging will be tailored by soliciting submissions; LOC can then use submitted content to invite others to participate. Traffic could also be directed to the LOC's website by the cross-content	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$250,000

	connection from Facebook and Instagram.		
LOC Email Newsletter	The LOC maintains an active newsletter that is emailed to LOC subscribers. Once the LOC begins gathering recording, it can use its email marketing program for dynamic and repurposed content to an existing network of LOC followers and supporters.	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$250,000
Creative Advertising	The use of creating advertising, particularly focused toward audiences of NPR, PBS, and Univision, will resonate with Segment 2 and Segment 3. Messaging can be tailored to use submitted video and audio recordings as a way to achieve originality and elaboration. The LOC can also pitch story segments to NPR about the initiative and the value of the collection.	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$600,000
Organizational Partnerships	By partnering and collaborating with AARP, the National Federation of the Blind, the American Legion, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, the LOC has the ability to engage all segments, particularly Segment 3. Messaging will be tailored with aid from these partners to utilize their expertise and knowledge of their member bases, and they can assist in the creation of effective messaging.	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$500,000
Content Marketing	This will resonate with all three segments, because this is about sharing the experience with the public. Sharing and leveraging submitted recording and stories is an effective method to market the initiative to others. We can use submitted stories to create digital programming on YouTube or share them on Facebook.	To implement within the first fiscal year and continue throughout the five-year project cycle.	\$500,000

V. Control Phase

Metrics

For the initial phase, the LOC should focus on digital and social media marketing, including the use of Google Ads, Facebook, Instagram, hashtag campaigns, and the LOC website. Through Google Analytics and Facebook Analytics, we will be able to track performance metrics and key performance indicators, including deliverability rate, open rate, click rate, conversion rate, and unsubscribe rate.

To support our digital marketing efforts, the LOC should create a branded hashtag specific to the COVID-19 Oral History Project and measure its popularity, reach, and interaction. The LOC's landing page will promote AFC and provide pop-up windows to further promote the initiative; Google Analytics can help to measure the click rates and the amount of time a person takes to interact with the page. We can also use Google Analytics to track the the click-through rates from PBS and NPR's websites directly to the AFC's COVID-19 Oral History Project. We can assess conversion rates to determine the success of advertising through PBS, NPR, and other organizational sponsors and partners.

Once the initiative is underway, we envision a dedicated portal on AFC's website where contributors can submit their digital recording, and we can utilize this submission portal to gather key metrics. By asking contributors for demographic and geographic details, we will be able to map and track our outreach efforts. This submission survey should include two crucial questions: "How did you learn about the COVID-19 Oral History Project?" and "How likely is it that you would recommend the COVID-19 Oral History Project to a friend or colleague?". In addition to gathering valuable ethnographic data, the latter question will allow us to establish a metric for Net Promoter Score (NPS) as an indicator of the project's perceived value. In addition to our marketing efforts, the success of the COVID-19 Oral History Project will be heavily dependent on the promotion and word-of-mouth influence of satisfied contributors.

ROMI

The COVID-19 Oral History Project presents a unique challenge. Unlike traditional library initiatives, our return on marketing investment has no bearing on membership, sustained transactions, or repeated submissions. Instead, we will be looking at how our marketing expenses correlate to the number of individual recordings submitted and the traffic brought to many of our digital resources. In the project's first fiscal year, the ROMI will be calculated on a month-to-month basis to determine if the marketing strategy is thriving and if we are receiving increased submissions through these promotional efforts. After the first fiscal year, the LOC should determine whether the ROMI contributed to positive growth. Once analyzed, we will be able to change our promotional content and strategies and address additional target markets.

Usage and Membership Increases

Once the COVID-19 Oral History Collection is established, the LOC will determine if the project and its promotional tactics increased usage and engagement with AFC. The LOC will use Google Analytics to analyze the length and frequency of engagement with the COVID-19 Oral History Collection and associated digital content.